

'82 cents: Wide in variety, but narrow in value

By Roger Boye

This week's column answers more questions about coins and currency.

Q—I've read that the government made seven varieties of pennies last year. Is this true? If so, are any of them rare?—G.B., Aurora.

A—The Lincoln cent endured two major changes during 1982: the well-publicized shift to zinc "slugs" coated with copper and the mid-year introduction of revamped "master dies" that included smaller numbers in the coin design.

Government workers failed to coordinate the use of new zinc "slugs" with "small-date dies," creating seven distinct types of cents. For the record, they are a 1982 no-mint-mark, large-date zinc cent and a large-date copper cent; a 1982 no-mint-mark, small-date zinc cent and a small-date copper cent; a 1982-D large-date zinc cent and large-date copper cent; and a 1982-D small-date zinc cent.

All of this is academic to would-be coin investors. None of the varieties has any special value on the hobby market because the government apparently issued billions of each.

Q—My \$1 silver certificate, series 1935-D, is missing the words "In God We Trust" on the back side. Is this a valuable printing error?—Y.P., Chicago.

A—Hardly. Treasury bosses added the motto to \$1 bills starting in 1957. Your specimen rolled off the press sometime between 1949 and 1953. It would be rare if it carried the motto!

Q—Our grandfather gave us a box of souvenirs he had for 50 years. In it were four tiny "half dimes" dated 1862. Are they counterfeit or just play money?—D.F., Downers Grove.

A—Neither. Until 1873 Uncle Sam made 5-cent coins out of silver, using half as much precious metal as in the dime. Bureaucrats introduced the larger nickel 5-cent pieces in 1866 and gradually phased out production of the half dime, in part because people found half dimes easy to lose.

Your relics would retail for \$5 each if in "good condition."

Q—Can you explain what the small numbers—such as A2, C3, etc.—mean in the upper-left corners of \$1 bills?—D.A., Chicago.

A—Currency is printed on large sheets of paper, 32 bills to the sheet. The numbers indicate the position of each bill on the sheet. For example, "1" identifies the upper-left quadrant, with letters "A" through "H" noting the eight positions within the quadrant.

Q—While vacationing in northern Minnesota this summer, we got more than 26 Canadian pennies in change, with the earliest dated 1956. Are any of them worth keeping?—R.E., Skokie.

A—Probably not. Circulated specimens of Canadian cents made since 1956 are not yet collectors' items.